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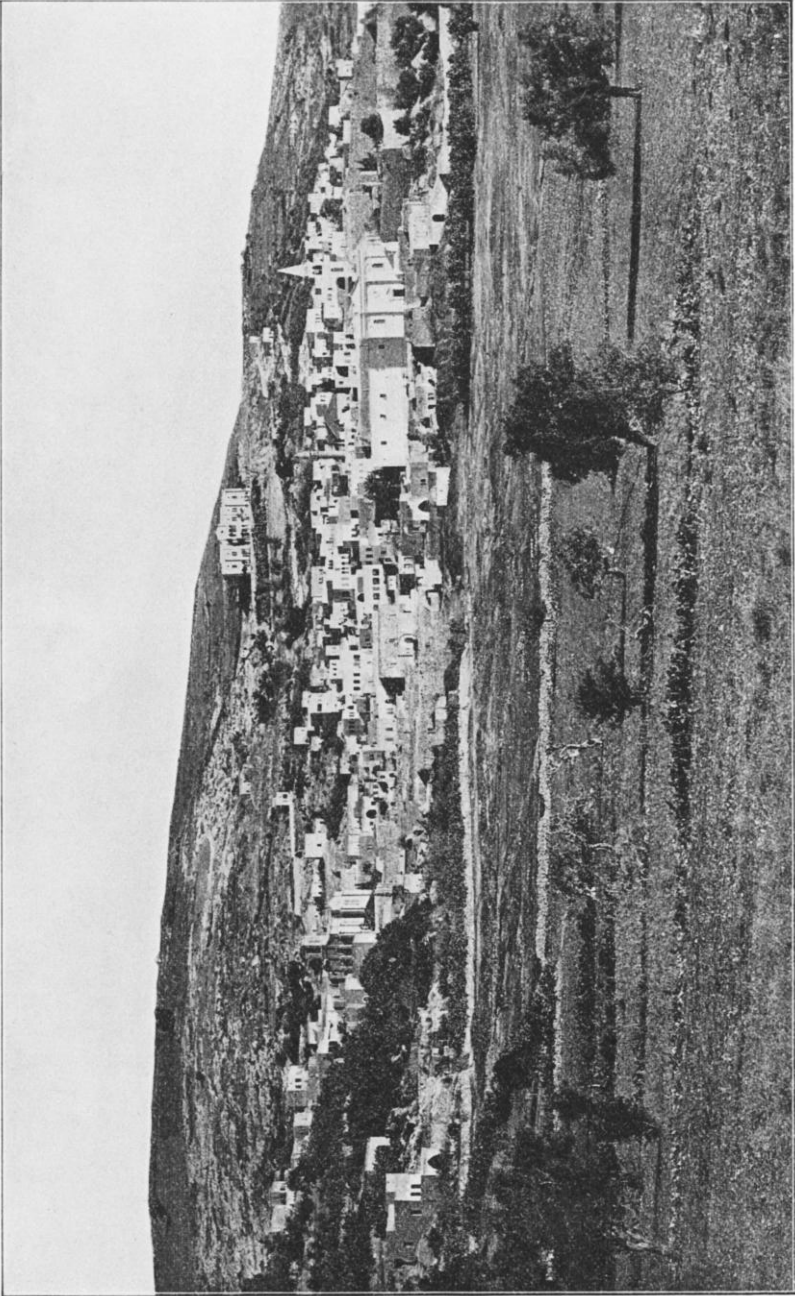
THE HOME OF OUR LORD'S CHILDHOOD.

By REV. PROFESSOR GEORGE ADAM SMITH, D.D.,
Free Church College, Glasgow.

The village in Israel's history.—The situation of Nazareth:—lower Galilee; the basin in which the town lies.—The view from the hill.—The great roads.—The memory of revolutions.

It is remarkable how many of the greatest lives in Israel were drawn from her villages or from the still more obscure and lonely edges of the desert. Apparently the one great career which sprang from the capital was Isaiah's. He, wherever born, was Isaiah of Jerusalem; rooted and grounded, pervasive and supreme, within those walls whose security he maintained to the end to be the one indispensable basis of God's kingdom upon earth. But in this identification with the city Isaiah was alone. Jonah came from Gath-hepher, Amos from Tekoa, Hosea from some part of Galilee or Gilead, Micah from Moresheth in the Shephelah, Nahum from Elkosh (perhaps another village of the Shephelah or possibly of Galilee), Jeremiah from Anathoth, John the Baptist from *the deserts*, and Jesus Christ from Nazareth—a village so unimportant that it is never mentioned in the Old Testament, even among the crowded lists of the tribal borders, very close to one of which it must have lain, and so destitute of the natural conditions of a great city that, with all the religious distinction which came to it nineteen centuries ago, Nazareth has never grown beyond a few thousand inhabitants.

The site and surroundings of Nazareth have been so often described that it is impossible to add another account which shall not be for the most part a repetition. I shall perhaps best fulfil the task assigned me if I first give the impressions, shared by so many travelers, of the secluded basin in which the village lies, and of the broad views opening from the edge of it, and if I



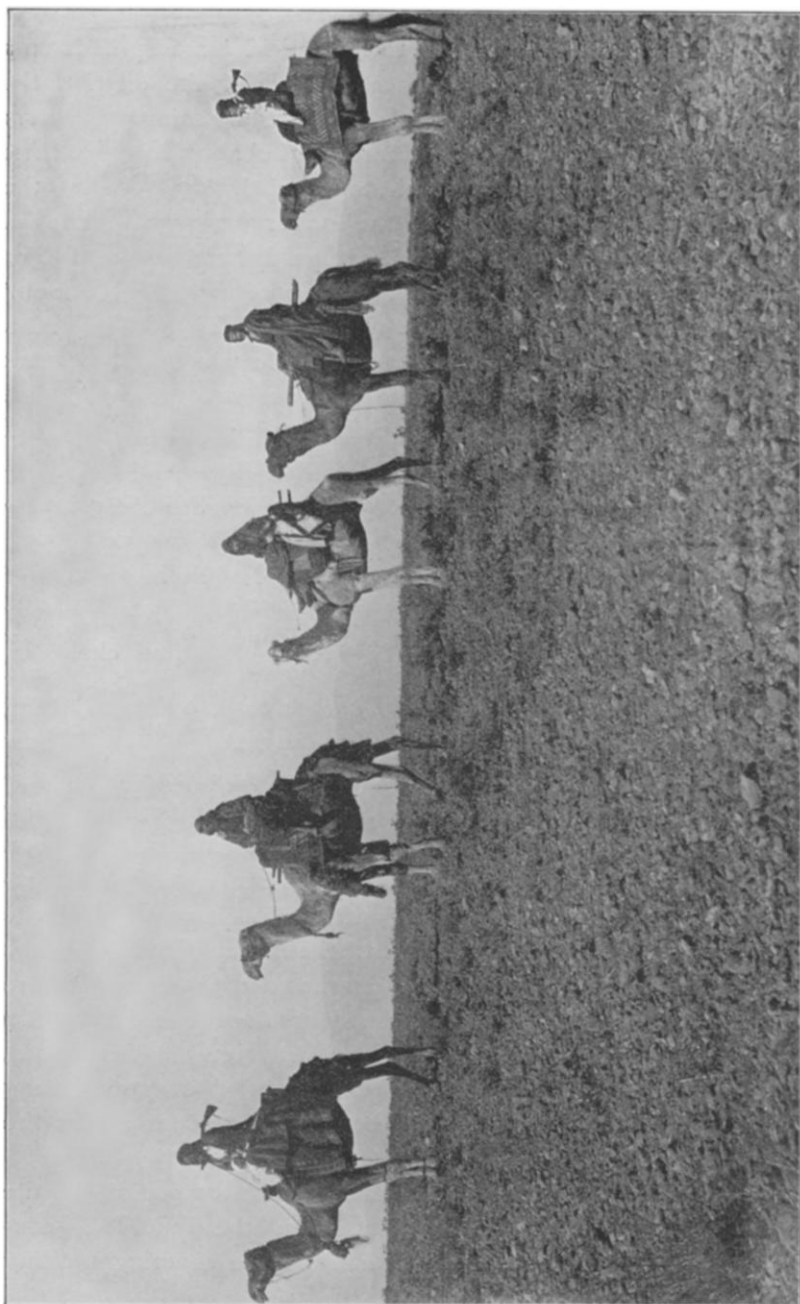
NAZARETH

battlefields; the Samaritan hills and their passes southward; the place of Elijah's sacrifice on Carmel, and the high green promontory running thence out upon the radiance of the sea; or, if you turn northwards, there are the hills above Acre, and, drawing home again, the plain of Buttauf, with the road from Acre to the lake; and on this side of the plain Sepphoris, the ancient capital of Galilee, with its ruined castle on a hilltop. It is a map of Jewish history, spread within sight of half a dozen points that the boys of Nazareth might have visited daily.

All this is familiar to us through the impressions of many travelers; but across the landscape there are certain lines which I failed to realize till I saw them with my own eyes and trod them with my feet. There are the roads, whose direction in the East is so changeless that upon their faint or less frequented tracks today you can still tread reaches of Roman causeway, and call up again the noise and splendor of the days when Greece and Rome poured along them to the East full tides of commerce and of war. There is a list of them within sight of the hill above Nazareth.

Immediately across Esdraelon, there open through the Samaritan mountains the mouths, a dozen miles apart, of two great passes from the south: that by Jenin, or 'En-gannim, and that by Lejjun or Legion, which was Megiddo. The former is the beginning of the "Anabasis to the hill-country"¹ of Samaria and Judæa, the road to Shechem and Jerusalem. The latter is the pass from Sharon to Esdraelon, by which the high road comes over from Philistia and Egypt. Issuing on the plain, these roads meet about six miles from Nazareth and passing below her hills swing off between them and Tabor towards the north end of the lake for Damascus and Mesopotamia. Twenty minutes' walk from Nazareth will bring you immediately above this road. A more distant branch of it, miles of which run within sight of the same point, swerves from Jezreel to the other side of Little Hermon and Tabor; while a third branch from Jenin crosses Gilboa to Bethshan and the Jordan. All these roads carried caravans between Egypt and Mesopotamia,

¹ B. R. of Judith III.



TRAVELERS CROSSING THE DESERT

long and half a mile broad, the town of En Nâsara spreads up a steep slope crowned by the highest summit of the district, the Neby Sa'în, with a small chapel to the Moslem saint after whom it is named. The ancient Nazareth probably hung a little higher up the hill, but still within touch of the one well of the neighborhood, that springs in the center of the modern town. The white houses of En Nâsara are partly visible from one or two points across the plain on the slopes of Little Hermon, but from nowhere else outside the basin. The trunk road crosses Esdraelon near the mouth of the winding gorge that leads up to the village, but the caravans swing sleepily past unaware of its existence. From the north it is wholly shut off by the ridge of Neby Sa'în. So also, if I remember aright, the view from the village itself is, except for a glimpse or two, limited to the basin.

The basin in which Nazareth lies is dry and gray. There are a few gardens below the town and some trees around, and especially above it. All the rest is limestone rock and chalky soil, with the glare of summer dulled by the sparse grass and thistle, very cheerless in wet or dark weather, but in spring flushing into great patches of wild flowers. It is a quiet hollow under an open heaven, a home with all its fields in sight, keeping the music of its life to itself. To the shepherd watching from the hill each of the few village houses must have been marked: the teacher's, those of the various elders, the synagogue, the inn, the baker's shop, and the carpenter's; here the noisy groups about the well, there the children playing on the street; there would hardly be a market place. Outside there were the village graves, the threshing floors, the rubbish heaps, the rocky paths with their very occasional travelers; flowers, trees, and birds, the sheep and goats, perhaps a bird of prey sailing lazily over, or a fox stealing in the noonday stillness across the gray hillside.

But climb to the edge of the basin, climb especially to the ridge of Neby Sa'în above the village, and this quiet, self-contained valley, that from its center sees heaven covering nothing

¹SUTHERLAND: *Palestine; the Glory of all Lands*. 146 f.

but its own fields, shrinks to a furrow in a vast and crowded world; vast, because besides mere widths of horizon there are in view almost every zone of nature, from the great sea and the shores where palms grow to the everlasting snows of Hermon; and crowded because history has seldom brought together



GENERAL VIEW FROM NAZARETH

within such a compass so many famous homes, altars, and battlefields, nor opened more promises (such as only open across the Mediterranean) of magic isles and coasts beyond. Hermon fills the northeast, and the hills of Galilee are piled against him. You see the hills of Bashan on the other side of the gulf, where the hidden lake lies; the long range of Gilead above the Jordan valley; nearer to you Tabor, where Barak camped, and Little Hermon, with Endor and Shunem on opposite slopes; Gilboa, with Jezreel and Gideon's fountain; Naboth's vineyard, and the scene of Jezebel's murder; Elisha's lodging, and the course of Elijah's race with Ahab's chariot; Esdraelon, with its twenty

battlefields; the Samaritan hills and their passes southward; the place of Elijah's sacrifice on Carmel, and the high green promontory running thence out upon the radiance of the sea; or, if you turn northwards, there are the hills above Acre, and, drawing home again, the plain of Buttauf, with the road from Acre to the lake; and on this side of the plain Sepphoris, the ancient capital of Galilee, with its ruined castle on a hilltop. It is a map of Jewish history, spread within sight of half a dozen points that the boys of Nazareth might have visited daily.

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between the coast and Arabia, and Roman armies marched by them from Cæsarea to the Decapolis, or the military posts on the Lake of Galilee; it was by the opening of Jenin that pilgrims returned to Galilee from the feasts at Jerusalem. Those



JENIN

citizens of Nazareth who had remained at home would come out to the edge of the hills and watch their friends crossing from En-gannim. And this way Jesus himself must often have traveled after he was twelve years old. The pilgrim bands, when they left Jenin, would anxiously scan the plain for caravans crossing it from Lejjun, and pause awhile if they saw the lances of a troop of Roman soldiers making for the same angle as themselves. They might also encounter caravans of Egyptian merchants and camel trains from eastern Palestine. Esdraelon (it cannot be too often repeated) was one of the great highways of the ancient world.

All this lay in sight of the Nazareth hills to the south, but from the summit behind the village an equally important road was in view to the north. Four and a half miles away, beyond Sepphoris, a city set on a hill, ran the highroad from Ptolemais, or Acre, to Tiberias, the Decapolis and the Roman frontier towards Arabia. Nearer still ran parallel to this a less frequented road through Sepphoris itself from which a branch cut down past Nazareth upon the Esdraelon roads. Realize that Ptolemais, only twenty-one miles from Nazareth, was one of the two great ports through which passed out and in nearly all the commerce between northern Palestine and Greece and Italy; and that at the other end of these roads was already flourishing the Greek culture which produced so many philosophers, poets, and wits in Gadara and other trans-Jordanic cities. Realize, too, the constant effort which these cities made to hold communication with Athens and Rome, and how the capital of the empire kept in lively touch with its eastern frontier. Remember Pliny's and Strabo's accounts of the herbs, the balsam, the dates and the flax' from the Jordan valley, the pickled fish from the lake, and the wheat from Hauran, which found their way to Ptolemais for shipment all round the Mediterranean. "The Roman ranks, the Roman eagles, the wealth of noblemen's litters and equipages cannot have been strange to the eyes of the boys of Nazareth, especially after their twelfth year, when they went up to Jerusalem, or visited with their fathers famous rabbis, who came down from Jerusalem, peripatetic among the provinces. Nor can it have been the eye only which was stirred. For all the rumor of the empire entered Palestine close to Nazareth—the news from Rome about the emperor's health, about the changing influence of the great statesmen, about the prospects at court of Herod or of the Jews; about Cæsar's last order concerning the tribute, or whether the policy of the procurator would be sustained. Many Galilean families must have had relatives in Rome; Jews would come back to this countryside to tell of the life of the world's capital. Moreover, the scandals of the Herods buzzed up and down these roads; peddlers carried them, and the peripatetic rabbis would moralize upon them. The customs,

too, of the neighboring Gentiles — their loose living, their sensuous worship, their absorption in business, the hopelessness of the inscriptions on their tombs, multitudes of which were readable (as some are still) on the roads around Galilee—all this would furnish endless talk in Nazareth both among men and boys."

But wilder things than these happened in the neighborhood of Nazareth when our Lord was spending his childhood there. Just before the time when according to the gospels the parents of Jesus brought him to the village, there had been a rebellion near Sepphoris. Judas, son of that rebel, Hezekiah, whom Herod hardly overcame, gathered a number of Galileans (among whom there may easily have been a man or two of Nazareth) and stripped the castle of Sepphoris of arms. Josephus adds that this Judas was very ambitious of being made king.¹ Varus gathered an army at Ptolemais, burned Sepphoris, making many of its people slaves, and then marched on Samaria;² his nearest road was past Nazareth. Sepphoris was rebuilt by Herod Antipas, who also, during the years Jesus spent in obscurity at Nazareth, built Tiberias, and by all the roads of Galilee swept foreigners, tramps, and rascals to a site which as yet no Jew would tread. The flames of rebellion had not been quenched by Varus. Judas still lived,³ and "Galilean" himself kept fretting the spirit of all his province. About the tenth year of our Lord the revolt broke out afresh. There must then have been much coming and going between Jerusalem and Galilee; Nazareth, one of the most southerly of Galilean villages and so near Sepphoris, was doubtless aware of some of it. In the great war fifty years later the first blow for independence was struck close by, at Dabaritta, and you understand why when you see the strategic position of the district, round the corner of the plain, with gorges running up through the Nazareth hills. These earlier rebels, therefore, of our Lord's youth, can hardly have kept the neighborhood of Nazareth out of their restless plans against the

¹ JOSEPHUS *Ant.* XVII: 10:5: cf. *Wars* II: 4:1. ² JOSEPHUS *Ant.* XVII: 10:9, 10.

³ On the identity of Judas, son of Hezekiah, with Judas the Galilean, see SCHÜRER, *Hist.* I, ii:80.

Roman forces. The movement, too, was mixed with feelings which must have drawn into it not only the rough bandits of the province, with no ambition save that of license disguised as freedom, but many of the purest and most patriotic villagers of Galilee. Judas rose against the Gentiles in the name of religion. But this again turned him more readily on the moderate men of his own people. The pitiless party of the Zealots was formed. There were many robberies, and assassinations of prominent and respected Jews.¹ Nor were the motives of the leaders above suspicion. Josephus says they fought for gain, and Judas probably still dreamed of a crown. The revolt, therefore, collapsed. Before the nation was kindled, the Romans scattered the sparks and they fell out of sight, to smoulder on in many places till they fired the great conflagration half a century later. One wonders if any of these sparks were thrown into Nazareth. Certainly the selfish sectarian and tyrannical spirit of the movement, ending in so abject a failure, cannot have missed judgment in her quiet homes. In Judas and his fellows the righteous must have seen how it was possible for a man to aim at the whole world and lose his own soul.

¹ *Ant.* XVIII: 1: 1.